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SUBJECT: ITALY: CHAMBER PRESIDENTS ELECTED, PRESIDENCY OF
THE REPUBLIC NEXT

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SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Italy's new parliament formally sat April 28 and subsequently voted Communist Renewal (RC) National Secretary Fausto Bertinotti President of the Chamber of Deputies and Daisy party leader Franco Marini President of the Senate. Both were contentious votes. As one of his first acts as Chamber President, Bertinotti set the date for election of the next President of the Republic on May 8, making it unlikely that Romano Prodi will receive a mandate to form a government this week or next. PM Berlusconi, who resigned May 2 but stays on as caretaker PM, formally endorsed a "Ciampi-bis" -- that is, that current President of the Republic Ciampi be re-elected for another term. Prodi, by contrast, appears to prefer elevating Democrats of the Left (DS) leader Massimo D'Alema, or another senior DS-affiliated official, to the Presidency. END SUMMARY.

NEW PARLIAMENT ELECTS LEADERS

12. (U) Italy's new parliament formally sat April 28. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, meeting separately, immediately began deliberations and voting for Presidents of the two houses.

BERTINOTTI IN THE CHAMBER

13. (SBU) Communist Renewal (RC) National Secretary Fausto Bertinotti was elected April 29 as President of the Chamber of Deputies. His election was all but secured the previous week when the only other viable candidate from the center-left "Union" coalition, Democrats of the Left (DS) President Massimo D'Alema, bowed out of the race. Prodi's majority in the Chamber is a secure 340 to 277. Nevertheless, some DS members showed their discontent with the selection of Bertinotti, casting 51 votes for D'Alema in the second vote April 28, which forced voting to continue until April 29.

MARINI IN THE SENATE

14. (SBU) In an even more contentious vote, the Senate elected Daisy party leader Franco Marini President in the fourth round of voting April 29. Marini defeated Senator for Life Giulio Andreotti by a vote of 165 to 156. Prodi's regular

senate majority of 158-156 is tenuous and will often require support from Italy's seven Senators for Life, five of whom generally lean toward the center-left.

15. (SBU) Senator for Life Luigi Scalfaro presided as temporary President over the senate proceedings. The second vote on April 28 was thrown into controversy when three senators wrote "Francesco" Marini on their ballots, and the center-right refused to accept that the senators had intended to vote for Franco Marini. In the third round of voting, the left-leaning Scalfaro announced "Franco," on a ballot that read "Francesco," counting it as a valid vote for Marini. Senate secretaries subsequently discovered the "error," and the center-right publicly accused Scalfaro of making a convenient mistake. The acrimonious show apart, many observers believe it no accident that three senators (plus another who submitted a blank ballot) cast dubious votes for Marini. They assert this was a clear message to Prodi by some of his erstwhile allies that he must be careful not to take their support for granted.

TOWARD A CIAMPI REPLACEMENT AND A NEW GOVERNMENT

16. (SBU) Election of chamber Presidents was the first step toward government formation. This week, parties are selecting their group leaders. As one of his first acts as President of the Chamber of Deputies, Bertinotti set the date for election of the next President of the Republic as May 8. Expectations had been that the vote to replace Ciampi, whose mandate expires May 18, would take place on May 13. Most observers believe that the accelerated election schedule reduces the odds that Prodi will get a mandate to form a government before the new President is elected. The new president would be sworn in a few days after his election. He would then normally conduct about two days of formal consultations before giving the new PM-designate the nod.

BERLUSCONI CALLS FOR A CIAMPI-BIS

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17. (SBU) PM Berlusconi, who formally resigned May 2, and his allies in the center-right officially endorsed a "Ciampi-bis," that is that current President of the Republic Ciampi be re-elected for another term. Prodi said that would be fine, but it was up to Ciampi to decide if he would like to continue as President.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) The government formation process remains fluid, and public speculation regarding the next President of the Republic and the various ministers varies wildly. It appears that Ciampi has received general support from business and political leaders and would easily win another term if he decided to let his hat be thrown into the ring. But Italian analysts say that Ciampi will not agree to a second term unless called on to serve, presumably by both coalitions. Prodi's comparatively lukewarm welcome falls short of that, so the assumption is that Prodi wants a DS-affiliated leader in the Presidency. While the center-left has the votes to do this, the question is whether they are willing to abandon the concept of a President with a broad consensus. DS President D'Alema, reportedly the lead Prodi candidate, faces center-right opposition. And, in a race where the person in the pole position almost always stumbles, DS-affiliated politicians Giulio Amato and Giorgio Napolitano also remain in contention. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Updated unclassified biographies for Bertinotti and Marini can be found on the Embassy's siprent website. Unclassified biographies for Prodi and his cabinet, when

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named, will also be posted.
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